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# BULLETIN

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# FURTHER NOTES ON SPARROWS *PASSER* IN KENYA AND SOMALIA

## 1) The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

In recent accounts of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in Kenya (Lewis 1983 a & b), I thought that the range extension from Mombasa was penetrating inland along the main Mombasa - Nairobi road and rail links, presumably by individuals accidentally carried in trains and haulage vehicles. Dispersal from Mombasa to other apparently suitable nesting sites along the coast was apparently not occurring, as there was only a single coastal record away from Mombasa, namely a female near Tiwi (4°14'S 39°36'E), 20 km to the south, on December 19 1982.

This situation has changed in that the species is now at least locally colonising other sites along the coast. To the south of Mombasa, Mary Sinclair (*in litt.*; *Museum Avifauna News* 1983a) observed a pair carrying nest material up into the central roof area of the Diani Reef Hotel (4°17'S 39°34E) on 23 April 1983. No further individuals were seen around the hotel buildings despite an extensive search. Miles Coverdale (*in litt,*) also reports the species from this hotel, and from the Kenya Calcium buildings at Waa (4°11'S 39°36'E), though he noted no breeding activity. Finally, to the north of Mombasa, there is an unconfirmed report of the species "in numbers" with Grey-headed Sparrows *P. griseus* at Malindi (3°13'S 40°07'E) (*Museum Avifauna News* 1983b).

Meanwhile, at the Caltex petrol station at Voi, the furthest inland breeding locality of this species which was discovered by Hector G. de Silva in August 1982 (Lewis 1983a), the persistence of at least attempted breeding is suggested by an individual seen carrying nest material by A.J. Holcombe on 26 December 1983.

The cause of this recent population increase and the extension of range inland and along the coast remains obscure.

## 1) A *Passer* hybrid in Somalia

Ash & Colston (1981) describe an interesting occurrence of a House X Somali Sparrow *P. domesticus* X *P. castanopterus* hybrid associating with a small colony of the latter species in a sea-cave at Hal Hambo (1 54'N 45 05'E), southwest of Mogadischu, Somalia on 6 March 1980.

They concluded that this bird had been produced by a pairing between these two species at a site probably not too far distant from Hal Hambo, and that the House Sparrow had almost certainly been introduced into the Somali Sparrow's range on board a ship (cf. Lewis 1983a).

Both these species occur in Kenya, but in areas *at present* sufficiently remote to preclude interbreeding (Lewis 1983b Fig. 4).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Mary Sinclair and Miles Coverdale for details of their observations, and to Graeme Backhurst for the provision of reference literature.

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## BIRD STUDIES IN ZAMBIA

On 15 October 1983 we flew from Nairobi to Lusaka to conduct studies of woodpeckerlike birds (woodpeckers, barbets and honeyguides), our aim being to gather new knowledge, partly for the forthcoming *Birds of Africa* Vol.3 which is to treat these birds. Biologist Robert Stjernstedt and teacher Dylan Aspinwall met us in Lusaka, and we were soon on the road with Bob to Ndola, on the Zaire border of central Zambia and at the edge of the "Copperbelt". Clide and Loretta Carter were our hosts and Clide had prepared well for our visit, finding nests and other activity sites for the birds we were after. Mr Carter spends all his spare time, away from an air transport business, engaged in local bird studies. With him we explored the miombo (*Brachystegia*) woodlands and remnant "Kalinari" dry forests in the region, which is incredibly rich in birds. Pine and eucalyptus plantations were commonplace, and the miombo itself represents a degraded denser woodland that has suffered through centuries of slash and burn cultivation, human-caused fires, grazing, selective cutting of trees and charcoal production. Fortunately some forest reserves encompass parts of the miombo, which in one form or another still occupies much of Zambia

Our visit was late for pre-breeding and early breeding activity - most birds had nests with eggs or young, and song was at a minimum. Nonetheless we were soon watching Anchieta's and Whyte's barbets at nests (Anchieta's nest had been undescribed), and were able to elicit vocal data from other barbets such as the Black-backed (or Maccleunies') and Miombo Pied barbets. Recording of their less common calls, with playback of these, gained us many insights into their biology. Bennett's Woodpeckers, Golden-tailed Woodpeckers and Black-collared Barbets also were very obliging. One highlight was the fledging of a Lesser Honeyguide from one of our two Anchieta's Barbet nests - the youngster, long fed by foster parents and helpers, was driven from the area by the adults as soon as it left the nest (showing its tell-tale honeyguide tail pattern).

Leaving Ndola we drove to the south of Zambia, staying with Meg and Paddy Bruce-Miller at their farm, "Muckle Neuk", north of Choma, and within the very restricted range of Chaplin's Barbet. We were pleased to have the assistance of the late Con Benson's former top collector Jarli Makawa, who helped greatly in locating nests of Crested, Miombo Pied and Chaplin's Barbets. The usual Lesser Honeyguide-barbet interactions were observed about barbet nests. One morning two Lesser Honeyguides were investigating a nest of Chaplin's Barbets in which incubation was occurring. Three adult Chaplin's Barbets were involved at the nest. One of the adults methodically removed one after another of the four eggs in the nest, and broke and dropped each of them. We recovered the shells and yolk material, and in discussions with Mr Colebrook-Robjent, we agreed that all four were eggs of the barbet, not of the honeyguide. We saw many other birds, of course, including the spectacular Magpie Shrikes.

Hurrying back north to Ndola we paused briefly in Lusaka to present a Zambian radio programme on bird vocalizations for the "Chongololo Wildlife Clubs of Zambia (chongololos = "Mombasa trains", millipedes). In our Ndola study sites several nests had sustained damage - one Miombo Pied Barbet nest had broken at the nest, the young were gone; a stub broke off just above one Anchieta's Barbet nest, not quite driving them away; and a Green-backed

(or Little Spotted) Woodpecker nest in an arboreal ant nest (a site not previously known) above water that had contained young close to fledging had disintegrated in heavy rain and fallen into the stream below. Shortly after our arrival on the scene one of the two Whyte's Barbet nests, having young, was attacked by siafu (safari ants), which destroyed the young. Despite these natural disasters we obtained many significant data, and tape-recordings that must now be analyzed spectrographically so that we may compare the repertoires of such closely related species as the Whyte's and Anchieta's barbets, which barely come into contact in northern Zambia.

All too soon we had to board the plane for the return flight to Nairobi. We were much impressed by the avifauna of Zambia and by the dedication and cooperation of those working with its birds. The large area and relatively small population of Zambia perhaps was responsible for some very favourable impressions regarding courteous drivers, pedestrians crossing roads without fear, and the rigorously enforced carrying and use in emergencies of large triangular caution signs by every car and lorry, placed before and behind a vehicle should it be forced to stop along the road. We were sad to see so few wild mammals outside the parks, and the use of so many exotic trees to replace the indigenous woodlands. We suggested to Zambian friends, as we do to those in East Africa: more cooperation and contact between the people, especially the youngsters of these countries, i.e. reciprocal visits by Zambian Chongololo Wildlife Club members and the members of the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. The dissemination of knowledge and practical experience is essential if wildlife is to be preserved in Africa.

Lester L. Short and Jennifer F.M. Horne, American Museum of Natural History
New York, NY 10024, USA.

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## SOME PLANTS SEEN ON THE TSAVO WALKING TOUR, SEPTEMBER 1983

It was good to have a report of the Tsavo walking tour by Adrienne Richardson in the last issue of *EANHS Bulletin*. As she said, the walk was quite hard going and we had a target to reach by lunchtime each day. However, it was a pity that we could not slow down the pace, the better to appreciate bird and plant life as we enjoyed the undoubted privilege of being on foot in this fascinating area of Kenya.

I made some effort as we walked to photograph or identify plants and later checked names with the Herbarium.. The following are some of the flowering plants seen.

Two of the well known cassia group were conspicuous. By the verge of the main road through Tsavo and elsewhere were the lovely yellow heads of *Cassia abbreviata* ssp. *kassneri* (Dale & Greenway 961, p.101), very showy against the leafless, woody shrub. This can be mo t easily recognized by the long cylindrical pod up to 60 cm, splitting to free the seeds.

Another cassia frequently seen in Nyika bush is *C. longiracemosa* (Dale & Greenway 1961, p 102 with small 6 cm black pods pointed and flattened and the yellow flowers much smaller, but typically cassia· the shrub is about 2 m high.

Quite close in classification was a common shrub some 1.5 m high with aggressive, recurved prickles but attractive mauve pink flower heads, sparsely scatterd on the often leafless plant. This was *Caesalpinia trothae* ssp. *erlangeri* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p.99) the woody, unarmed fruit pods were only 4 cm long. This plant is common in the coast and Northern provinces. One of our accompanying Park Rangers told me that the juice from the roots of this plant is used medicinally for the eyes of

cattle.

Common shrubs in Tsavo which cover vast areas but have inconspicuous flowers are *Boscia coriacea* (Dale and Greenway *op. cit.* p.113) and *Salvadora persica* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p.496). The *Salvadora* is also known as the Toothbrush Tree, Mswaki in Swahili. Like *Boscia* it is named in Boran, Somali, Kamba and Turkana which immediately gives an indication of its habitat.

*Boscia* is one of the shrubs properly labelled at the Mtito Andei park entrance and has small hard green balls of fruit (following green-yellow sweet scented flowers) and many rigid, hard leaves about 7 cm long which are pale grey-green in colour. *Boscia* is a member of the Capparidaceae, several of which are well represented in the more arid areas. They are remarkable for having the ovary on a stalk, the gynophore, and in some genera the stamens are also stalked, on an androphore. The stalked ovary of course, becomes a stalked fruit.

*Thylachium africana* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p.128) has trifoliate leaves and the 5 - 10 ribbed fruit on its stalk is quite distinctive, as also the calyx of the flower which splits transversely to reveal the bunch of spreading pin-like stamens - no petals.

The delicate, yellow-green flowers of the shrub *Cadaba farinosa* ssp. *adenotricha* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p. 115) was another common plant in this family. *Cadaba* is well eaten by animals in Nairobi National Park The *farinosa* (Latin for 'floury' *farinosus*) presumably refers to the grey-green leaves which are glaucous.

Several *Combretum* trees were seen, many having small, white, rather star-like flowers along the twigs and/or the distinctive woody winged fruit *Combretum aculeatum*, *C. heierense* and *C. mossambicense* were seen. The latter was a small tree by the Tsavo river, not far from where we had a lovely view of hippo, mother and baby looking at us warily from the far bank. A very photogenic scene and there ought to be some very fine pictures as a result.

At the second campsite, by the water's edge was a large bush, the composite *Pluchea dioscoridis* (Agnew 1974 p.445) "confined to ground water in dry areas". Scrambling over it was an attractive asclepiad climber *Oxystelma bornuense* ssp. *kassneri* (Agnew *op. cit.* p.374). The climber has large (3 cm across) bell-shaped white flowers with maroon markings within, leaves sagittate (arrow shaped) and the fruit green and spherical....

At our last campsite a woody shrub was common, having flowers but no leaves. The petals were strap-shaped and greenish to pink. This was one of the Acanthaceae *Anisotes dumosus* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p.17). Seen also, as we walked in scrubby vegetation by the river was a woody herb, *Ecbolium subcordata* with remarkable cyan green-blue spikes of flowers, well worth a photograph. Another species seen only in fruit, spikes of papery bracts, was *E. revolutum*. A common straggling herb of the shady areas under trees was *Hypoestes verticillaris* having white flowers with a spotted purple throat.

Another plant worthy of note is *Euphorbia tescorum*, seen in the crevices of a rocky outcrop where we had climbed to look for game. The snaking green stems, four angled and wickedly spiked splayed out in all directions. Its small, rusty red flowers were highlighted by the background of pale green branches and grey rocks.

Mention must be made of the wonderful sight of a flowering baobab *Adansonia digitata* (Dale & Greenway *op.cit.* p.66) in a rocky gully where we had paused for breath and shade. However, I was urged by our leader, Jim, to climb the rocks in order to get a better photograph of the hanging blooms at the best angle, with a telephoto lens! The five creamy-white petals with a central mass of pale yellow stamens are not a common sight.

Along the banks of the Tsavo River and indeed marking its course when we had strayed away from it, were groves of Doum Palm *Hyphaene coriacea* (Dale & Greenway *op. cit.* p.12); their fallen leaves and fruit easily tripped up unwary walkers.

Other plants noted were: *Conocarpus lancifolius, Hygrophila auriculata, Cordia sinensis, Lawsonia inermis, Grewia tristis* and *Sporobolus geminatus*.

These are just a few of the plants able to survive in the arid bush of Tsavo and maintain its ecosystem. Game can only thrive where the rich food store of such plants is available.

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Mrs Ann Birnie, Box 30158, Nairobi.

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## SIGHTING OF PEL'S FISHING OWL AT BUSHWHACKERS

On 18 July 1983 we spotted what was almost certainly a Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli*, 1 - 2 km south of Bushwhacker's camp (north of Kibwezi). The bird was observed in flight after we flushed it from a tree with dense foliage situated immediately along the east bank of the Athi River, at approximately mid-day. We were struck by its very large size (in the range of the Verreaux's Eagle Owl), its rufous colouration, the large prominent beak, and the absence of conspicuous ear tufts. We know of no other owl species which shares these characteristics. Also, as would be expected, the bird stayed along the river while we observed it. After being flushed, it landed in a second tree, about 100 m further upstream. Shortly thereafter it flew again, this time to a tree on the opposite bank. We were unable to make further observations.

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## UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF A RED-CHESTED CUCKOO

Usually, one hears rather than sees the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* since it seems to be high in trees, hidden by foliage and its call is rather ventriloqual. I have spent a long time and had many a sore neck trying to find it.

On 3 December, 1983 in my garden off Ngecha Road, Nairobi, a Red-chested Cuckoo came and perched 2 m up in an almost leafless tree 12 m from my house. For nearly an hour, it used this perch as a Fiscal Shrike would, to fly down and catch insects in the grass, returning either to this perch or to another open tree about 5 m high. It was fully visible all the time and did not appear to make any attempt to hide behind what foliage there was.

The bird was observed to catch insects in the grass. It was not as shy as it usually is and even the arrival of a Pied Crow *Corvus albus* to the bird-bath below its perch did not frighten it away.

I take it that the very dry weather has led to a dearth of caterpillars high in the trees and so to an enforced change of habits.

P. Le Pelley, Box 30333, Nairobi.

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## MONITOR EGGS

Cowles (1930) in *Journal of Entomology and Zoology* 22: 1-32 described how the Nile monitor *Varanus niloticus* (Linnaeus) lays its eggs in a hole dug into a live termite mound, so that the warmth of the termite nest incubates the eggs. The closely related savannah monitor *Varanus exanthematicus* (Bosc) seems to have a similar habit. I have several times found the empty shells of a small clutch of about 6 to 10 eggs inside a mound of *Macrotermes subhyalinus* (Rambur) near Bissel, Kajiado District, Kenya. (This is a smaller clutch size than the 16 to 34 eggs recorded for the Nile monitor by Cowles). Although they were deep inside the fabric of the mound, the eggs were not directly in contact with the termite nest.

It seems that this is not an obligate relationship. In May 1978 we dug up a clutch of ten eggs in loose soil in the garden at Kajiado Field Station. The eggs were elongated, approximating to a cylinder with hemispherical ends. The shell was dull white and slightly soft to the touch. I put the eggs in a plastic box with a loose lid and kept them in an incubator at 30°C, which is the temperature of the inside of a *Macrotermes* mound. In the middle of June, six of the eggs hatched out surprisingly large lizards, which must have been wrapped round into about three complete loops to have fitted into the eggs. The lizards had a mean weight of 1.59 g (1.47 - 1.62 g). The empty egg shells weighed 0.066 g when dry, and a quantity of albumin was lost when the lizards hatched. The lizards themselves were rough-skinned, either plain dark grey or ash grey with light speckles. From the first they were extremely active and nervous, and they did not show the slightest recognition of, or affinity for their siblings.

I was about to go on leave, so I did not attempt to rear them, but just let them go.

Jo Darlington, c/o Section of Entomology, National Museums of Kenya, Box 40658, Nairobi.

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## FIELD NOTES FROM AUEA BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

### CATTLE EGRET BREEDING

While rushing through North Kinangop in the evening of 7 June 1983, I noticed a nesting colony of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, in the juniper trees to the right of the road from Naivasha as you enter the North Kinangop centre. The colony was in the trees just before and up to the corner of the junction of the road turning right to South Kinangop. Location at 0°36'S., 36°34'E. There were about 20 nests and many birds in the trees and young birds showing in some of the nests. They were very noisy! The ground around the trees was white-washed. Not knowing the unusualness ofa breeding record for the Cattle Egret I failed to make all the observations that I should have. Has anyone else seen this breeding colony?

### WHISKERED TERN BREEDING NEAR ELDORET

On 30 October 1983 the AUEA ornithology students observed Whiskered Terns, *Chlidonias hybridus*,,over Pirei Lake and the surrounding swamp, location 0°17'N., 35°05'E. Many of the terns were carrying pond weed from the swamp and carried them to the lake to feed to noisy young terns that could fly.

On 6 November I observed terns carrying nesting material over the lake and 2 nests with 2 young chicks each. The parent terns were feeding the chicks

with frogs. The nests are made of long strands of pond weed *Potamogeton schweinfurthii*, and float near or among the leaves of the blue waterlily, *Nymphaea caerulea*. The nest is flat and holds the eggs or chicks about 2 cm above the surface of the water. The parent terns were very aggressive to birds of prey flying over the nest area of the lake. On 8 November I ringed 7 Whiskered Tern chicks ranging from 34.7 g to 87.6 g and in wing length from 33 mm to 153 mm. Eight nests with eggs were found: one with 1 egg, one with 2 eggs and 6 nests with 3 eggs each. Eggs were dark green with dark brown spots, 41 cm long and 28 mm wide and very pointed at one end. The nesting of the Whiskered Tern is very protracted. Nesting on Pirei Lake must have started in early October or before with nest building continuing into early November. By 17 December 1983 all nesting was finished and only one Whiskered Tern was seen flying over the lake.

ZANZIBAR SOMBRE GREENBUL NEAR ELDORET

On 14 December 1983 a Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus importunis fricki* was caught on the AUEA campus, at Baraton, 38 km SW of Eldoret, location 1 15'N., 35 05'E. G.R.Cunningham-van Someren of the National Museum, Nairobi identified the specimen.

Larry Siemens, Biology Department, Adventist University of Eastern Africa, Box 2500, Eldoret, Kenya.

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## BELLS ON CROWS LEGS

In 1962, whilst stationed at Mandera as D.C., one of my safaris took me to a border post by the name of Melka Murre. This place is about 25 km north-west of Rhamu on the Daua Parma, and it is in fact the northernmost border post in north-east Kenya.

The first morning I was awakened by a tinkling noise. At first I thought it was a herd of goats with bells around their necks. Then I perceived that the noise was coming from above me - I had slept in the turret of the small Police Post. I then espied a number of Black Ravens flying about above me, and I soon discovered that the tinkling was coming from them. A number of them had small silver metal bells attached to their legs. These were presumably attached by the local people, but I never found out why. Does anyone have any ideas?

Fergus McCartney, Mweiga Estate, Box 453, Nyeri.

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## QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK REVISITED

We are used to the fact that our friends think us safari mad. Having announced in Nairobi that we intended to revisit the Queen Elizabeth National Park (as it is again called) after a fifteen year absence, and that we intended to do this by motor car, we were told how unsound such a plan was. We were told that Uganda is in turmoil, that there is no security, that the roads are undriveable, that there is no food, that we would not find petrol and that, should we manage to arrive in the Western Rift, we would not find lodging and would be unable to drive around in the park because all the tracks are overgrown. And lastly, that there is no game left anyway.

The journey to Kampala was uneventful, although sections of the Busia - Kampala road were very bad. We saw various road blocks manned by armed young men but most of these were policemen and on the few occasions when we were not simply waved through they were exceptionally friendly and polite.
As it happened we were attending a conference in Kampala and enjoyed private hospitality. Hotel accommodation in Kampala is difficult to come by, expensive, and has to be paid for in hard currency.

We took the southern route to the Western Rift, driving through Masaka and Mbarara, having been told in Kampala that the road through Mubende and Fort Portal is of questionable security. The Masaka road is presently being rebuilt and some sections towards Mbarara are rather bad but further west the road improves. There was petrol available everywhere and the price is about the same as in Kenya. All along the roadside and in the markets there is plenty of fruit and vegetables available. Tinned food can be bought in Kampala.

Mweya Lodge is being rehabilitated and the accommodation is clean - running water, soap, towels and toilet paper being provided. If there are a sufficient number of guests to warrant it then the hot water boilers are switched on. If there are few guests then, in order to economise on diesel fuel, only one or two boilers are switched on and hot water is brought to the rooms on request. Service is friendly, most welcoming and honest. The food is not exactly Cordon Bleu standard but adequate, and the bar is well stocked.

Many of the tracks in the park have been regraded and others are in the process of being made accessible. Launch trips can be arranged on the Kazinga Channel and the ferry is operating again. Although the game depletion is obvious it is simply not true that there is no game and no hope of recovery. Generally speaking, along the main roads and around Mweya Lodge, where the destruction was greatest, game numbers are still low and most of the animals

are shy, but in the less easily accessible parts of the park there are large herds of kob and buffalo. There are plenty of hippo, although of course not yet such large schools as one used to see. There are elephants and, to our astonishment, some of them are really good tuskers. In fact we have seen some tusks of a size which one would have difficulty in finding in any of the Kenya National Parks.

It appears that much game, particularly elephant, returning into the park or, more precisely, are returning from the forests within the park where they have been hiding. We were told that the estimated number of elephant has had to be revised upwards quite frequently and that at present the count is in the order of 1 200. There are again breeding herds in the park and whilst we were there one numbering 200 was sighted in the Channel. It is alleged that numbers increase daily because now poaching pressure on the Zaire side is causing the elephant to flee to the safety of the Uganda Park.

There are various explanations for the depletion of the game and whilst it is true that some were shot for trophies and some for meat, the real destruction appears to have been just vandalism, wanton killing by armed men.

The ecological changes are formidable. In this particular park the most important browsers were the elephant and, as the elephant are still avoiding the immediate vicinity of the bigger roads, bush and forest is far more conspicuous than it used to be.. This in turn gives shelter to bushbuck, which have increased in number, and also to the leopard, which was apparently a beneficiary of the ecological disruption. In turn the leopard took to game-bird hunting and has depleted the number of guineafowl, francolin and ground hornbill. The numerous lions exercise considerable pressure on the kob and probably retard their recovery. The most conspicuous ecological change however, is the immense increase in human population at the periphery of the park and also within the park where squatters in the fishing villages greatly outnumber the legitimate inhabitants.

Visitors to the park come in spurts. We were told that on some days all the 52 rooms in Mweya Lodge are occupied by overseas tourists, mostly from Germany and Italy. However, we were also told that Ugandan residents flock in greater and greater numbers to the park populating the lodge on weekends and public holidays.

We had opportunity to learn about park matters from the Warden, Mr Paul Ssali. Poaching apparently is minimal and firewood gathering and tree felling have been completely stopped. The park is well patrolled and the Rangers appear to be devoted to their job and reasonably equipped although, of course, short of transport. The airfields at Mweya and Ishasha are in excellent condition and can take twin engine general aviation aircraft of any size.

On the south side of the channel game is much more numerous and numbers steadily increase as one travels towards Ishasha. The Ishasha road is better than we remember it. The camp at Ishasha is very pleasant and consists of a number of self-service bandas. All bedding and towels are provided, there is plenty of water, and an outstanding feature is the friendly and helpful staff. There is a provision store at which one can purchase tinned meat, fish and vegetables; spirits, beer and soft drinks are also obtainable.

The Ishasha lions still like to climb trees where they spend much of the day in the most awkward and cumbersome looking positions. Nights are noisy as hyena and lion abound. Kob are very numerous and there are large herds of buffalo. We had the impression that the topi are rather lower in numbers than previously - we did not receive any explanation for this, except the assertion that there was no large scale destruction of game at Ishasha and therefore the reason must be some natural one.

Bird life in the whole of the park is as abundant and exciting as ever. The QENP is indeed a haven for ornithologists and there are some 500 species of birds in the very varied habitats of the park. Even though we are laymen

we had no difficulty in identifying some 125 bird species in the few days we were there (identification in our strict practice requires that a bird is seen or heard by both of us and we *both agree* on its identity). The most exciting discoveries for us were the African Crake, the Yellowbill, the Blue-throated Brown Sunbird and the Dwarf Kingfisher.

In conclusion we would like to say that we had a very interesting, comfortable and reassuring visit to QENP. We not only found the scenery as beautiful as ever and the bird life as exciting as it always was, but we also found more game than we had expected and more important, we found friendly and happy people dedicated to restoring the park to its former grandeur. These people deserve support for the tremendous effort they are making - and the best way of supporting them is, of course, to go and visit the park. The journey, whether by road or air, is safe and the discomforts rather modest in comparison to the rewards.

We hope that this report will encourage like-minded people in Kenya to place a visit to the QENP on their 1984 itinerary.

We append a list of the mammals and birds seen and identified. The numbers in parenthesis after the common bird names are from *Birds of East Africa*.

MAMMALS: Yellow-winged Bat; Black-faced Vervet; Olive Baboon; Black and White Colobus; Spotted Hyena; Lion; African Elephant; Hippopotamus; Warthog; Topi; Uganda Kob; Defassa Waterbuck; Bushbuck; African Buffalo.

BIRDS: White Pelican (11); Pink-backed Pelican (12); Long-tailed Cormorant (17); Greater Cormorant (18); Grey Heron (25); Goliath Heron (26); Black- headed Heron (27); Cattle Egret (32); Great White Egret (34); Little Egret (36); Yellow-billed Egret (38); Hamerkop (42); Saddle-billed Stork (48); Marabou Stork (49); Yellow-billed Stork (50); Hadada (51); Sacred Ibis (54); Egyptian Goose (61); African White-backed Vulture (85); Ruppell's Vulture (86); White-headed Vulture (90); Pallid Harrier (93); Harrier Hawk (96); Bateleur (101); Tawny Eagle (116); Wahlberg's Eagle (118); Augur Buzzard (120); Long-crested Eagle (130); Martial Eagle (134); African Fish Eagle (137); Black Kite (138); Black-shouldered Kite (142); Quail (165); Harlequin Quail (166); Scaly Francolin (184); Helmeted Guineafowl (190); Crowned Crane (194); African Crake (197); Black Crake (201); Jacana (225); Grey Plover(241); Crowned Plover (244); Senegal Plover (246); Wattled Plover (248); Spur-winged Plover (249); Common Sandpiper (252); Little Stint (272); Black-winged Stilt (282); Water Thicknee (290); Grey-headed Gull (306); Gull-billed Tern (320); Ring-necked Dove (346); Laughing Dove (351); Blue-spotted Wood Dove (355); Red-headed Lovebird (363); Red-chested Cuckoo (399); Yellowbill (401); Blue-headed Coucal (404); White-browed Coucal (406); Speckled Mousebird (459); Blue-naped Mousebird (461); Pied Kingfisher (465); Malachite Kingfisher (466); Shining-blue Kingfisher (468); Chestnut-bellied Kingfisher (473); Woodland Kingfisher (475); Dwarf Kingfisher (477); White-throated Bee-eater (479); Little Bee-eater (491); Broad-billed Roller (500); Black and White Casqued Hornbill (513); Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird (549); Red-capped Lark (601); Rufous-naped Lark (612); Flappet Lark (621); Striped Swallow (624); Eurasian Swallow (634); Black Rough-wing (640); Banded Martin (641); African Sand Martin (642); Square-tailed Drongo (645); Pied Crow (654); Black-lored Babbler (683); Common Bulbul (732); White-browed Robin Chat (751); Sooty Chat (771); Northern Wheatear (777); Grey-backed Cameroptera (837); Yellow-throated Longclaw (988); African Pied Wagtail (991); White Wagtail (992); Yellow Wagtail (996); Northern Puffback (1000); Black-headed Gonolek (1003); Grey-backed Fiscal (1032); Violet-backed Starling (1048); Wattled Starling (1052); Blue-eared Glossy Starling (1055); Ruppell's Long-tailed Glossy Starling (1060); Yellow-billed Oxpecker (1077); Blue-throated Brown Sunbird (1097); Red-chested Sunbird (1098); Olive Sunbird (1112); Scarlet-chested Sunbird (1122); Grosbeak Weaver (1134); White-winged Widowbird (1138); Fan-tailed Widowbird (1140); Southern Red Bishop (1150); Black-headed Weaver (1165); Masked Weaver (1170); Vieillot's Black Weaver (1175);

Black-necked Weaver (1176); Red-billed Quelea (1193); Grey-headed Sparrow (1206); Pin-tailed Whydah (1216); African Firefinch (1239); Black and White Mannikin (1265); Bronze Mannikin (1267); Brimstone Canary (1293).

Imre and Valerie Loefler, Box 47964, Nairobi.

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## ETHIOPIA - A NEGLECTED NEIGHBOUR

My aunt Priscilla Allen, well known to most members of the EANHS, has often remarked to me what a pity it is that East African Bird lovers are so singularly ignorant of Ethiopia, where she lived herself for three years in the 1960s. It is true that they are in good company: four of the twenty three Ethiopian endemic species described by Urban (1978) namely, Harwood's Francolin *Francolinus harwoodi*, Ruppell's Chat *Pentholaea melaena*, Abyssinian Cat Bird *Parophasma galinieri*, and Yellow-throated Seed-eater *Serinus flavigula* are not listed by Williams (1980), although that normally excellent field guide professes to cover Ethiopia. (There are now twenty four Ethiopian endemic species since John Ash (1979) discovered and described the Ankobar Serin *Serinus ankoberensis*.) Moreover, Williams (*op.cit.* p.94) remarks of the White-collared Pigeon *Columba albitorques* that it "is a little known bird inhabiting remote cliffs and gorges in northern and central Ethiopia" although two years earlier Urban (*op.cit.* p.11) had pointed out (as I can myself bear witness) that this bird is a "common feature of many plateau villages and towns . . . including cities like Addis Ababa". And the mysterious "greyish, long-tailed bird with red or chestnut under tail-coverts" mentioned by Williams (*op.cit.* p.12) as being glimpsed in the Mathews Range of northern Kenya is surely, suggests my Aunt Priscilla, none other than the Abyssinian Cat Bird *P. galinieri*, "frequent to common in the western and southern highlands" of Ethiopia, Urban (*op.cit.* p.21) and familiar to anyone acquainted with Addis Ababa garden birds.

My aunt's comments were vividly brought home to me during a distressingly brief and busy visit to Ethiopia. I am no ornithologist, I had neither field glasses nor books, and my bird watching was virtually limited to the last forty minutes before sunset one evening as I walked up the back drive of the centrally located Hilton Hotel in the capital city, Addis Ababa.

Near the hotel's back gate the ubiquitous Black Kite *Milvus migrans* was deferring in its scavenging to some very large black birds that I thought for a startled moment to be hornbills; they were the Thick-billed Raven *Corvus crassirostris*. Tramping up past the tennis courts I could hear in the shrubberies much very lovely, but unfamiliar, bird song (probably, *inter alia*, the Abyssinian Cat Bird mentioned above); but I could see nothing until I reached the top of the slope and observed no less than five different species in a single low spreading acacia tree. None of them was in the least shy, so I could approach really close. From my notes, my aunt and I have been able to identify four of them fairly certainly: The Tacazze Sunbird *Nectarinia tacazze*, common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*, Speckled-fronted Weaver *Sporopipes frontalis* and Grey Tit Flycatcher *Myioparus plumbeus*. The fifth must remain doubtful. None of my aunt's suggestions seem right to me; but she has no record herself of ever seeing in Addis Ababa my "preferred solution": the White-rumped Seed-eater *Serinus leucopygius*.

Dusk was now falling, so I had to walk on, passing a rowdy party from the turaco family, almost certainly the Eastern Grey Plantain-eater *Crinifer zonurus*. As I watched them clowning in the honeysuckle by the car park, and tried to get a better view than a silhouette, two little green parrots flew over, very probably Black-winged Lovebird *Agapornis taranta*. And in shrubs

at the corner were several argumentative Red-billed Buffalo Weavers *Bubalornis niger*, with the pink bills of the juveniles glowing vividly in the setting sun.

Almost night now, but not so dark that I could not identify, swooping and circling around the high hotel building, numbers of graceful African Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula* and big, relatively clumsy White-collared Pigeon *C. albitorques*.

And that was all I had time for, apart from glimpsing more of the same (especially the kites, ravens and pigeons), plus some mousebirds near the museum (probably Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus* and a lone Augur Buzzard *Buteo buteo*) towards the slopes of the Entoto Hills. But - as if to emphasize how much I was missing in such a hurried visit - I glimpsed several more birds through the windows of the bus to the temporary airport at Debrezeit; all but three of them too quickly to identify. One was a biggish shrike *Lanius* sp.; the other two were unmistakeable: the familiar Bateleur Eagle *Terathopius ecaudatus*; and - high, high above - the prodigiously long wings and long wedge-shaped tail of a Lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus*.

There are at present numerous difficulties for travellers in several parts of Ethiopia, but some of the most exciting parts of that sensational country are even now reasonably accessible for the tourist. What is more there is an active and friendly Natural History Society (Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, Box 1160, Addis Ababa), which can no doubt suggest where to look for most of the country's 830-odd recorded birds. Fame might easily come your way too! For example, Urban (*op.cit.* p.12) remarks of the Yellow fronted Parrot *Porcephalus flavifrons* - a "regular visitor on the Military Hospital grounds near the old airport in Addis Ababa" - that "this parrot is so poorly known that practically any information an observer discovers about it will be new to science". When Urban was writing, less than ten years ago, he applied much the same remarks to nearly all the other Ethiopian endemics, even common and widely distributed ones. Apart from those I myself had the good luck to note (the White-collared Pigeon, Thick-billed Raven, and perhaps Black-winged Lovebird and Abyssinian Catbird) such fairly common endemics include the Wattled Ibis *Bostrychia carunculata*, Banded Barbet *Lybius undatus*, Abyssinian Longclaw *Macronyx flavicollis*, White-winged Cliff Chat *Thamnolaea semirufa*, White-backed Black Tit *Parus leuconotus* and others with more restricted distribution.

I have no doubt at all that the botanists, unquestionably the geologists, and presumably students of every other corner of natural history would find just as much excitement on offer in a country with a fascinating historical dimension as well. So - echoing Adrian Lewis' words in a recent *Bulletin* Lewis (1983) - I would join my Aunt Priscilla in urging the Society's members to "Get up there".

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Hubert J.B. Allen, Aronskelkweg 97, The Hague, Holland.


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## SOCIETY EXCURSION TO POTHA, MACHAKOS

About 40 members swarmed south from Nairobi on 27 November and arrived at Potha, the home of Mrs Dorothy Percival, at 10 a.m. The day was cool with occasional spitting rain and heavier downpours could be seen on the hills around Machakos about 10 km to the north. Despite this however, Potha farm itself was very dry, with 2 mm of overnight rain - just sufficient to lay the dust.

Pursuing rare birds seen earlier in the morning, we drove a short distance to a dry, rocky stream bed and walked along it. Interest was mostly ornithological and a few members found a Levaillant's Cuckoo (English names follow Britton, *The Birds of East Africa*), while about half of the party saw a group of Hinde's Pied Babblers. This latter species is local and little known, and is in fact one of the very few birds that are only found in Kenya, on the southeastern edges of the central highlands: the birds were silent and obscure in thickets on the stream's banks, and we could have walked right past them were it not for a burst of their loud babbler calls. They were pursued through thorny thickets for a short way but were then lost, so we retraced our steps along the stream bed and returned to the beautifully situated farmhouse for a picnic lunch supplemented by Mrs Percival's liberally dispensed coffee, beer and sodas.

After lunch, despite rain apparently closing in from the surrounding hills, we drove to Theki inselberg, a conical hill near the main Nairobi-Mombasa road. A Temminck's Courser and Northern and Isabelline Wheatears were seen on recently burnt ground. Most of the cars were left near the base of the hill, and we strode up the track in reasonably cool and windy weather. Rock Hyrax *Heterohyrax brucei* were seen on low bluffs, and an Augur Buzzard and a pair of Verreaux's Eagles were soaring on the orographic updrafts produced by the strong wind on the hill's flanks. There was however no sign of the Violet-crested Turacos which occur on the nearby Mua Hills, nor of the Red-winged Starlings which have nested in the telecommunications tower on Theki's summit. The top of the hill afforded impressive views, but heavy showers were falling and the surrounding storms loomed closer, so we returned to Mrs Percival's house to be very hospitably rejuvenated with tea and cakes. With rain all around but the Potha area still dry we left the farm at 4.30 p.m., most grateful to Dorothy Percival and her daughter Felicity's warm hospitality while we were there.

Adrian D. Lewis, Geology, Box 30197, Nairobi.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

On the evening of 6 January 1984, I released two Spotted Eagle Owls, which had been bred in captivity, in a garden in Karen.

I saw them the following morning sitting in a tree with about thirteen different species of birds mobbing them. Here is a list of the birds I could identify:

White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher; Common Bulbul: African Firefinch; Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu; Malachite Sunbird; Namaqua Dove; Olive Thrush; Robin Chat; Chin-spot Batis; Kikuyu White-eye; Black-headed Oriole; Masked Weaver; Streaky Seed-eater.

Nörbert Rottcher, Box 29231, Kabete, Nairobi.

Sir,

We are hoping to arrange a tour of Kenya for the Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe and are hoping that 14 - 16 persons will be able to join the tour, However, as the holiday allowance restrictions here make it difficult to travel abroad, the number is only 10 at the moment.

The proposed itinerary is: 12 - 17 May at the coast, the nights of 17/18 May in Nairobi, 19 - 26 May on an up-country tour and finally, the nights of 27 - 29 May again in Nairobi. The bookings are already arranged at very favourable rates for the beach and for the up-country tour; and I was hoping that members of the EANHS would be kind enough to offer hospitality for the nights to be spent in Nairobi. We would be delighted to reciprocate for any EANHS members wishing to visit Zimbabwe.

Should we not reach the minimum number of 14, perhaps some of the members of the EANHS would like to join us to make up the number?

The cost of the up-country tour is K.Shs.4 408 per person plus Shs.1 818 for the transport and includes visits to Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru Lodge, Kericho Tea Hotel, Kakamega Forest, Lake Bogoria, Lake Baringo Lodge, Samburu Lodge, Naro Moru River Lodge and ending with a night at Treetops.

My husband and I were very active members of the EANHS whilst we lived in Nairobi.

Mrs Elizabeth Myall, Myta Agencies, P.O. Box BW 369, Borrowdale, Zimbabwe.

Would any members willing and able to offer accommodation and hospitality and/or would like to join the tour, please write direct to Mrs Myall who will then be able to furnish a list of names with a more detailed itinerary and costings.

Secretary, EANHS, Box 44486, Nairobi.

Sir,,

NEST BOXES

For all interested members - the booklet describing these and their application, is published by the British Trust for Ornithology "Field Guide No.3 - NESTBOXES" and is obtainable from the RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL, England. Price £S1.25 plus postage, say 50p.

Peter Davey, Box 15007, Nairobi.

Sir,

With reference to Miss Allen's account of the lecture by Dr Hebrard on "The distribution and ecology of Chamaeleonid Lizards" in the *Bulletin* 1983:89. An important additional note is required with reference to the distribution of the pygmy Chamaeleon *Brooksia*.

Dr Hebrard stated that apart from a small population in the Shimba Hills they have not been found nearer than southern Tanzania. However, there is a single specimen of *Brooksia* now in the collection of the Department of Herpetology, National Museum, Nairobi which was collected on 2 December 1979 by Peter Namyenya during the joint expedition of the National Museums of Kenya and the Vienna Museum to the North Nandi Forest at Chemisia. This is an extension of the distribution of the genus.

G.R. Cunningham-van Someren, National Museums of Kenya, Box 40658, Nairobi.

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# KENYA - A VISITOR'S VIEW

As footloose naturalists, we have spent the past year poking around Europe and Africa. After our travels across Africa from west to east by expedition truck, Nairobi comes as a shock - a pleasant shock. A wonderful oasis of civilization and available services, we have settled down to wallow in its luxury for a few months. Not only are the material goods and services available but it is a pleasure to again make contact with conservation and natural history people.

Kenya is world famous for its national parks - and justly so. Although there are problems with the establishment and maintenance of the parks as there are in other countries, Kenya has done a remarkable job of preserving excellent examples of natural flora and fauna. Perhaps not all of the plant and animal species have adequate protection at the moment, but compared to other parts of Africa, Kenya can be proud of its efforts.

For the visiting naturalist, there are an amazing number of things to see and do in Kenya, even within easy range of Nairobi. The variety of habitats and landforms within a day's drive of the city is quite astonishing. From coastal forest to alpine meadows to wetland and dryland areas is a short distance here, and each has its own distinctive flora and fauna to discover. In our native Canada, one would have to travel for days to find such a variety. The bird life here is even more exciting than we had been led to expect. No wonder the Wednesday morning bird-walks are so well attended! Our friends back home would be amazed, as we are, at the variety of colour, shape and habits of the avifauna here. (But it's reassuring to find that there are "little brown jobs" here too!)

One of the great pleasures in coming to Kenya is the wealth of natural history information available here - guides to the national parks, locally based wildlife magazines, and the Collins bird guide which is relatively accurate and easy to use. That's a pleasant change from the countries of Central Africa, where information is almost impossible to find, and sorting out the ranges of rainforest birds is a frustrating patchwork job from guides to adjacent areas.

The local knowledge of birds here is also a great asset. For visiting birders, the Wednesday morning walks with Fleur Ng'weno are a marvellous introduction, and Adrian Lewis' guide to the best bird-watching areas (published last year in the *Bulletin*) is a real find. Perhaps the Society should consider running it off separately for distribution as a service to visiting naturalists. And what a pleasure to find the EANHS deeply involved in ringing projects and a bird atlas, both activities that we remember fondly from back home.

It's not all roses for the visiting naturalists, of course. We find Kenya surprisingly expensive, with many prices comparable to or above those in Canada. This is especially true for organized safaris or car hire, making some of the best areas difficult for the budget traveller to reach. And of course, some of the roads are not the best, and it can be difficult to make contact in some parts of the Nairobi phone system, but these are minor complaints. For us, such difficulties have become insignificant in the face of the warm welcome we have felt from the naturalists of Nairobi.

Kenya has a lot to offer, both in its cultural and natural wealth, and in the accessibility of those treasures. We couldn't imagine a better place in Africa to spend a few months exploring and enjoying, and no doubt our Canadian friends can expect to hear endless enthusiastic reports about our experiences here.

Janet Grand and Ron Reid, 4 Nottinghill Rd, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada
Phone number in Nairobi until April - 61586

## CORRECTION

GRAMINEAE PART 2. The price of this part of the Flora of Tropical East Africa given in the *Bulletin* 1984: 17 should read Sh. 60/- and not Sh. 2/-

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## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Has any member seen an Otter *Aonyx capensis* in Lake Nakuru and, if so, when? If possible, can the date and location be given?

R.P. Chapman-Purchas, Box 1029, Nakuru

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## NOTICES

The Museum library is remaining open during the lunch hour from 31 Jan. 1984 for a trial period. If this proves popular, this arrangement will become permanent.

The Elsamere Conservation Centre at Naivasha is now open and ready to welcome guests.

The Department of Ornithology of the National Museum would like to inform members that it produces the *Museum Avifauna News*, a monthly newsletter which is sent to interested persons free of charge, on request.

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## FOR SALE

Backpack, internal frame, in good condition, light weight, medium size. Sh. 200/- Contact Arjun Guneratne, Box 44231 or phone 566660 evenings.

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## SOCIETY FUNCTIONS

MONDAY 12th March, 1984: In the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. The Annual General Meeting followed by a film, "The Southernmost Forests of the World". This film is about Tierra del Fuego showing the unique animal and bird life plus the people and overall features of the region. Approximately 30 minutes.

MONDAY 2nd April, 1984: In the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. Ron Reid and Janet Grand will give an illustrated talk "A Naturalists Ramble Across Canada.

MONDAY 14th May, 1984: In the Museum Hall, Nairobi at 5.30 p.m. Don Fawcett of ILRAD will give a lecture on "The Unseen World of the Electron Microscope", followed by a showing of some of his transparencies of animals and birds.

WEDNESDAY MORNING bird walks led by Mrs. Fleur N'gweno continue. Please meet at the National Museum at 8.45 sharp.

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## NOTICE TO ANYONE INTERESTED IN BIRDS:

are you a birdwatcher/photographer/ringer newly arrived in Kenya, and in search of details of local birds, good areas to visit, relevant literature and ringing and other research schemes? Contact Adrian D. Lewis (Geology), Box 301 97, Nairobi, for information.

# THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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## MEMBERSHIP

This offers you free entry to the National Museum, Nairobi; free lectures, films, slide shows or discussions every month in Nairobi; field trips and camps led by experienced guides; free use of the Joint Society-National Museum Library (postal borrowing is also possible); reciprocal arrangements with the Uganda Society's Library in the Uganda Museum, Kampala; family participation: wives and children of members may attend most Society functions; one copy of the **EANHS Bulletin** every two months; a copy of each Journal published during your period of membership; the Society controls the ringing of birds in East Africa and welcomes new ringers and runs an active Nest Record Scheme; activities such as plant mapping and game counting are undertaken on a group basis. Membership rates are given at the foot of this page.

## JOURNAL

The Society publishes **The Journal of the East Africa Natural History Society and National Museum.** Each issue consists usually of one paper, however, sometimes two or more short papers may be combined to form one number. The aim of this method of presentation is to ensure prompt publication of scientific information; a title page is issued at the end of each year so that the year's papers may be bound together. Contributions, which should be typed in double spacing on one side of the paper, with wide margins, should be sent to the Secretary, Box 44486, Nairobi, Kenya. Authors receive twenty-five reprints of their article free, provided that these are ordered at the time the proofs are returned.

## E.A.N.H.S. BULLETIN

This is a duplicated magazine issued six times a year, which exists for the rapid publication of short notes, articels, letters and reviews. Contributions, which may be written in clear handwriting or typed, should be sent to The Editor **(EANHS Bulletin)**, Box 44486, Nairobi, Kenya. Line drawing will be considered if they add to the value of the article. Photographs cannot be published.

## SCOPUS

The Ornithological Sub Committee publishes this quartely bird magazine. Cost: EANHS members KSHS. 75/= p.a. All correspondence to D.A. Turner, Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya.

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